

Anti-Semitism, History, and Philosophy: the case of Heidegger, in particular



Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber, and co., 1957.

This man who comes anyway and urgently wants to write a dissertation is a Jew. The man who comes to see me every month to report on a large work in progress is also a Jew. The man who sent me a substantial text for an urgent reading a few weeks ago is a Jew. The two fellows whom I helped get accepted in the last three semesters are Jews. The man who, with my help, got a stipend to go to Rome is a Jew. Whoever wants to call this 'raging anti-Semitism' is welcome to do so. Beyond that, I am now just as much an anti-Semite in University issues as I was ten years ago in Marburg. To say absolutely nothing about my personal relationships with Jews [e.g. Husserl, Misch, Cassirer, and others]. And above all it cannot touch my relationship to you.¹

1. Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters, 1925 – 1975* (Harcourt, 2004), letter no. 45.

~ Heidegger writing to Hannah Arendt about rumors that he was anti-Semitic.

But there is a very important difference between the living and the dead. The living can come to see how their actions were wrong, acknowledge that, and show remorse. When their acts were crimes, they can also face justice. We just cannot afford to be as understanding of present prejudices as we are of past ones. Changing society requires making people see that it is possible to overcome the prejudices they were brought up with. We are not responsible for creating the distorted values that shaped us and our society but we can learn to take responsibility for how we deal with them now.

*The dead do not have such an opportunity, and so to waste anger chastising them is pointless. We are right to lament the iniquities of the past, but to blame individuals for things they did in less enlightened times using the standards of today is too harsh.*²

~ Julian Baggini

I. History

Join us to review and discuss your ideas related to a brief introductory overview of (1) the history of anti-Judaism/Jew and anti-Semitism; (2) a selection of philosophers (and their philosophies) who sat in the mainstream of both anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and either contradicted, embraced, or ignored it or failed to see its significance.

A little history

How do I understand, even discuss, “What is a Jew and Who Made Him?”* if I’m not a Jew? How do I describe, and not defend, anti-Semitism, its historicity and tie it closely to current acts, without elevating or giving authority to its perpetrators?

*Jean-Paul Sartre, paraphrased from “Anti-Semite and Jew.”

In November 1987, Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, spoke at a conference center built inside the shell of the destroyed Reichstag, the German parliament during the Nazi era. In that speech, he stated: “We may—and we must—hold today’s generation responsible, not for the past, but for the way it remembers the past. And for what it does with the memory of past.” TO BE CONTINUED.

2. “[Why sexist and racist philosophers might still be admirable](#),” Julian Baggini, *Aeon*. Not explicitly about *anti-Semitism* and philosophy, but Baggini’s argument applies just the same. While acknowledging his premises, I cannot draw his conclusion that somehow we cannot *both* hold responsible *and* admire. Or even neither—*neither* hold responsible *nor* admire... See below the section on “Pernicious prejudices and philosophers.” In other words, being dead is irrelevant.

See [AntiSemitism Timeline, Antiquity to 21st Century](#)

Jewish diaspora and homeland

Recorded events in Jewish history are too numerous to recount here. Suffice to say the Jews (and others) have tracked Jewish history through archeological and other records. Most familiar might be the event **c. 1312 BCE** Exodus from Egypt (Moses), recorded in the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament).³

Jews always regarded the Land of Israel as the Jewish homeland. The State of Israel after its establishment in 1948 adopted the 1950 Law of Return restoring Israel as the Jewish homeland and making it the place of refuge for Jewish refugees at the time and into the future. During the Jewish Diaspora successive waves of “return” included (all population counts are approximate):

- Pre modern: Small-scale return.
- First Aliyah: 1882-1903. Agriculture Aliyah, a major wave of Zionist immigration to Ottoman Palestine.
- Second Aliyah to Ottoman Palestine: 1904 and 1914, approximately 35,000 Jews mostly from the Russian Empire, some from
- Second Aliyah: 1870s until the 1920s. Over two million Jews from Eastern Europe.
- Third Aliyah: 1919 (end WWI), until 1923, (economic crisis in Palestine). Approximately 40,000 Jews.
- Fourth Aliyah: 1924-1929. 80,000 Jews mainly from eastern Europe, half from Poland, the rest from USSR, Romania, and
- Fifth Aliyah: 1929-start WWII. 225,000 to 300,000 Jews. Began as a pioneering effort. Mass migration between 1933 and 1939 onset persecution in Nazi Germany.
- *Aliyah Bet*: 1934-1948 code name given to illegal immigration by Jews, most of whom were Holocaust survivors and refugees from Nazi Germany. Violated restrictions laid out in British White Paper of 1939.
- Bricha (“escape” or “flight”). After 1939. Underground effort to help Holocaust survivors escape post-World War II Europe to the British Mandate for Palestine (in violation of the White Paper of 1939). Ended Israel’s declaration of independence (annulled White Paper).
- Other Aliyah: From Middle East and North Africa; western and Communist countries following the Six-Day War; post-Soviet states to the State of Israel in the 1990s.

³ The meaning of “**Torah**” is often restricted to signify the first five books of the **Old Testament**, also called the Law (or the Pentateuch, in Christianity). These are the books traditionally ascribed to Moses, the recipient of the original revelation from God on Mount Sinai.

II. Philosophers and anti-Semitism

We draw attention to the curious fact that important philosophers have harbored anti-Semitic beliefs. This ought to be puzzling, given the philosophical penchant for perennially hyping the *impartiality* of reason and its independence from dogmatically held beliefs. *Self-scrutiny* has, at least since Socrates, been a hallmark of traditional philosophical practice. Yet, philosophers as varied as Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Kant, Frege, and, of course, Heidegger, to mention only a few of the famous, expressed anti-Judaic sentiments.⁴ Even philosophers who were themselves either Jewish or half-Jewish such as Spinoza, Marx, Bergson, Arendt, Weil, Derrida, and Wittgenstein have been accused (correctly or not) of consorting with “Jewish self-hatred.”⁵ Experiences specific to the individuals and their historical conditions may explain some of this. But the times or one’s social milieu have never been convincing excuses for one’s beliefs and behavior in philosophy.⁶ A philosophy with any integrity must know its social conditions, and a philosopher his personal motivations inside out and take those into account.

So, I submit, no philosopher worth their salt is anti-Semitic (or racist or sexist) just accidentally. They *must*, in some sense, know what they are doing—or beholden to figure it out. They *must* intend to draw motivation from their metaphysics, logic, epistemology and ethics for the expressions of their partiality. They must be prepared to offer a reasoned argument with, at least, a *prima facie* claim to soundness. To do that, they must be more than a little acquainted with the philosophical aspects of the target of their aversion. In this context, they must be anti-Judaic, not *merely* anti-Semitic, to both oppose Jewry and preserve philosophical integrity.

A good philosopher’s thinking is never separate from their expression, it *ought* to hang together. The same exculpatory gestures that work for non-philosophers won’t work for them—otherwise, these philosophers were never that great anyway, if it is even appropriate to call them “philosophers” at all. They didn’t meet the minimum standards for their calling. They were just ordinary people who may be excused (perhaps⁷) for gaping incoherences between their life and thought. Not so, “great” philosophers. These must *own* their pronouncements.

4. Though arguably not “anti-Semitic,” more on the distinction below.

5. A species of philosophical “low self-esteem.” It may come in a variety of flavors: “Catholic guilt” or even “the Protestant work ethic” (which implies a recalcitrant nature, soteriologically in need of discipline).

6 What self-respecting philosopher would describe what they are doing as merely giving expression to, or rational articulation of, their *zeitgeist* or a distillation of the dominant guiding principles or belief-systems currently enveloping them? Not *merely* that, *at least*, they will say. And yet any competent philosopher cannot help being cognizant of the social and historical (and even biological) origin of the conceptual envelope they are in. Even if they *merely note* this envelope without explicitly abstracting from it, they must *mean* something by this gesture. (Wittgenstein, for instance, meant to show us something by suggesting philosophy was a mental disorder. Kant, for another, meant something—less often appreciated—by saying the women were amoral or that morality did not apply to them. We are not merely being anachronistic to think Kant was *just* sexist. He was making the profounder point, noticed by his “mad” follower, Otto Weininger, that the nature of *ethical restraint is sexed* at its core.)

7 Baggini, for one, thinks there is meaning in putting on a show of “forgiveness.” *Op. cit.*

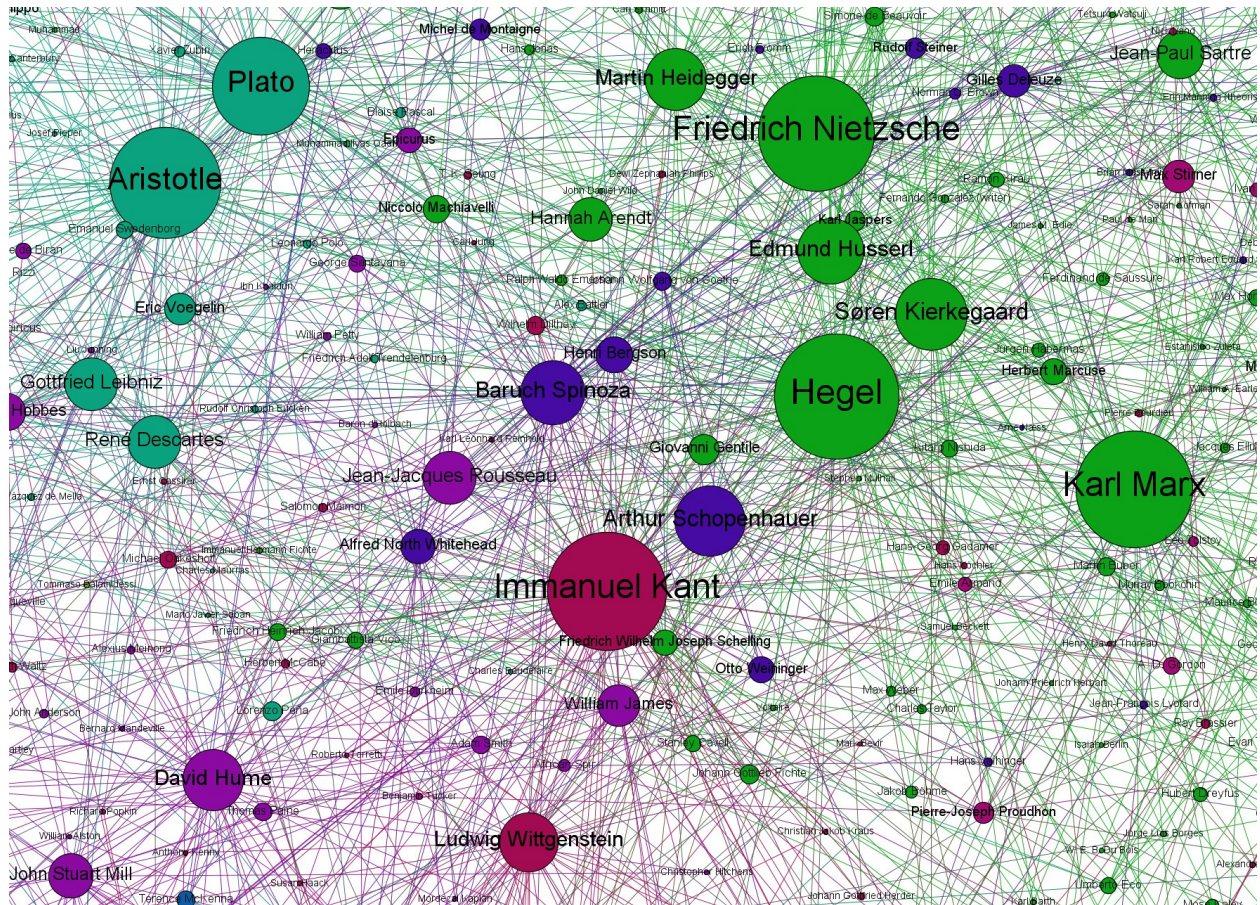
Heidegger, in particular

According to an often cited study⁸ asking about the “great” philosophical classics of recent philosophy, the top ten are:

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*
2. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*
3. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
5. Bertrand Russell and A. N. Whitehead, *Principia Mathematica*
6. W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object*
7. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*
8. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*
10. A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*

Whatever this ranking means (and philosophers might argue until the cows come home about that), Heidegger figures highly. Further confirmation of Heidegger’s influence can be found in a recent graphic generated by a systematic software scour of Wikipedia articles on philosophical thinkers. The “influences” and “influenced” input for every philosopher listed was gathered to produce [this chart](#) (a large file, be sure to zoom in). Among the noticeably large nodes in the chart for *Twentieth* century thinkers, again, only Wittgenstein matches or outdoes Heidegger.

⁸ The full list with discussion: Douglas P. Lackey, “[What Are The Modern Classics? The Baruch Poll Of Great Philosophy In The Twentieth Century.](#)” *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXX, No. 4, December 1999.



Wittgenstein and Heidegger are the most influential *Twentieth* century Western philosophers. (Note that time is an important factor in the reach of philosophical thought. Philosophers have to be dead a century or more before their full relative significance is likely to be measured adequately. That's why all the really big nodes belong to very dead philosophers.) See [complete chart](#). [More about](#).

We expect the best philosophers to inspire because of their special insight and ability to think straight *and* relevantly about the most important and fundamental issues of both their time and all time. It was never unknown to those who knew Heidegger, including his colleagues and students—especially the Jewish ones, that he found Judaism objectionable. Certain core assumptions of Jewish thought about “rootedness” were especially problematic for him. The degree of his distaste was made clear in his recently published Black Notebooks (*Schwartz Hefte*). From 1933, Heidegger was a card-carrying member of the National Socialist Party of Hitler. Early on, he lectured in support of its agenda or his interpretation of it.⁹ But this didn't (and hasn't) stopped Heidegger's philosophy from being a major fascination of many Jewish thinkers.

9. He may even have fancied himself an intellectual leader of the Nazi Party or “spiritual guide” of Hitler. It's unclear, however, how much the real leaders of Nazi ideology took Heidegger seriously, or even read him.

Why did Heidegger believe the things he did about Jews? Exactly what did he believe about them? And why do so many Jewish thinkers—certainly not all, but some very important ones—continue to find in him *both* a worthy inspiration *and* antagonist?

What Heidegger was thinking

Interview with Mary

Mary: *I think what I'm asking with my questions is what do we hope to gain by looking at these philosophers and their ideas in this context?*

Most of what I've learned from studying philosophers comes from observing how they react to pressure from social or natural sources. How do people who have devoted their lives to thinking hard about difficult problems try to make sense of their historical realities. For example, consider Germany after the 1918 Armistice. Perhaps 100,000 Germans died in the streets of Berlin from starvation, 600,000 children were malnourished... all because of [food blockades](#) carried out by the Allied powers, especially Britain. Elias Canetti, the Nobel laureate writer (of Sephardic Jewish ancestry, incidentally), whose long memoir I read, describes having to step over decomposing bodies walking the streets in Berlin at this time. This is the human environment in which Heidegger matured. Germany and the other losing countries were deliberately and systematically punished after WW1. It is not hard to imagine how one might come away from such an experience with profound resentment at the guiding principles of one's oppressors, and to someone as aware of the history of ideas as Heidegger these Allied values conduced to an overweening respect for rationalism, technology, and democracy. There is too much tolerance for the human abuse of these dogmas.

Heidegger had little sympathy for the rationalist, universalist, and egalitarian tendencies of philosophers like Plato and Kant who were important founders of Western liberal institutions. He thought that the only salvation for Germany lay in rooting itself in a powerful, all-consuming, national identity at all costs. Humans are *not* equal to each other. Some are better than others.¹⁰ This is what we must believe to hold us together in the face of an openly hostile and threatening world. The “us” versus “them” ontology here was very real and present (and, despite what many “humanists” would have us believe, and as Nietzsche would put it, only “all-too-human.”) The Western liberal democracies, especially Britain.¹¹ and the U.S., hardly behaved like they had successfully abstracted away from animalistic vengeful tendencies. So why should Heidegger

10 If this partiality strikes you as irresponsible, is a mother irresponsible to place a greater value on *her* children over those of others? Perhaps, so. But are you *prepared* for the moral fallout? This is *not* a rhetorical question. Some, I think, a very few, are. Take dyed-in-the-wool utilitarians.

11 The man who helmed Britain during “its finest hour” was not above promoting a “raw white supremacism and a concentration camp network of his own.” See [Johann Hari, “Not his finest hour: The dark side of Winston Churchill”](#). Had Hitler never existed, we would still have had Churchill to compare the thug-of-the-day to. See Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made*, Henry Holt and Co., 2010. “[T]he Aryan stock is bound to triumph” said ~~Adolf Hitler~~ Winston Churchill.

believe the rhetoric of “enlightened” humanism? Heidegger, in reaction, reverted to a tribalism reminiscent of Aristotle. And, ironically, of the Jews.

I think it helps to have this background in mind to understand both Heidegger and the reactions to him. Many of Heidegger’s critics are unabashed believers in the notion that humans can transcend their animality and become rationally enlightened, egalitarian and impartial. Heidegger’s experience suggested to him this was probably a joke...

I don’t suggest that Heidegger, in the end, was right to revert to a more ancient, atavistic solution to giving people something to believe in. I have the same criticisms of Heidegger as I do of Aristotle: their *all-too-human* atavistic tendencies. That said, I am always curious to learn why his critics are so hopeful about the role reason plays in our lives.

Mary: *Doesn’t seem like Heidegger “owned” anything as a consequence in history. We are looking at him to better understand the human condition or what it means to be human and flawed?*

If you mean it doesn’t seem he “owned” his mistake or took responsibility for what his philosophy helped to encourage, perhaps he didn’t think he needed to. He may have thought himself right all the way to his grave.

Mary: *In this instance who does the blaming? It is very difficult to hold individuals and society accountable for beliefs and behaviors? Do you mean that we cannot or no individual can exonerate themselves solely based upon the social conditions. Also while I suspect philosophers think of themselves as superior, I do not. Are you talking about how philosophers feel or think about themselves. Heidegger is not self conscious about his embrace of Nazism? Philosophers are no different from ordinary people who embraced beliefs and commit actions that are not considered crimes . . . Philosophers can’t be held to account except in the view of history . . . some thoughts?*

As to the question, whether philosophers actually are determined in their beliefs by their historical situation, I think that is certainly true. Although their perspective, in the best cases, is informed by a greater span of history and ideas than is typical outside of philosophy. Either that, or they are really incompetent.

Although this happens in science and other areas, criticism and skepticism of every idea set encountered is not a side effect but *a core function* of philosophy. Thus, philosophers like to think they are especially “informed” on these matters, that they and they alone are best suited to pass judgment on the correctness of ultimate assumptions. That only they, having surveyed and

scrutinized the possibilities, are the best authorities. This makes them seem arrogant—an occupational hazard, I must say. And some of the arrogance is quite real. But the best philosophers know this and make efforts to counteract it. Nevertheless, sometimes truths strike them as so self-evident that they cannot imagine anyone not agreeing with them who isn't mistaken. And they "go to town" with these ideas...

How does this make them different from ordinary people? They aren't that different. After all, ordinary people sometimes take their cues from philosophers, or, at the very least, ordinary people believe in institutions whose core ideas were invented by philosophers: rights, logic, ethics, democracy, political and legal institutions, the assumptions shoring up scientific methodologies, and on and on.

But, besides inventing concepts out of whole cloth—something not typical of normal folk going about their normal business, philosophers are also different in another way. They can defend their positions from criticism with more success than the ordinary person. Their competence at this is what can make them dangerous—not personally dangerous,¹² but because others, in large numbers, often defer to them, "the folk" are liable to distort their grasp of "big ideas."

In the final analysis, I don't think Heidegger, himself personally, was responsible for inspiring even one person to eliminate one Jew. He thought Jews stood for something that was anathema to the healthy development of Germany. But he was not a proponent of the racialized notion of anti-Semitism that pervaded mainstream Nazism. The Nazis ideologues had plenty of other inspirations, and it is doubtful that many read Heidegger or even knew who he was. Some who tried reading him even thought his work "gibberish." But, indirectly, major thinkers influence minor thinkers who, in turn, sometimes, usually only after decades or centuries, influence institutions, and these shape "the folk."

Relevant passages from "[What Heidegger Was Hiding: Unearthing the Philosopher's Anti-Semitism](#)," by Gregory Fried in an article in *Foreign Affairs*:

...for Heidegger, there was no transcendence and no Platonic God—no escape, in effect, from the cave. Meaning lay not in serving abstract ideals but in confronting one's place within the cave itself: in how individuals and peoples inhabited their finite existence through time. Heidegger's conception of human being required belonging to a specific, shared historical context or national identity. Platonic universalism undermined such collective forms of contingent, historical identity. In the eyes of a transcendent God or natural law, all people—whether Germans,

12: Not physically dangerous. I only know of one important philosopher whoever used a gun *philosophically*. And he used it on himself: [Otto Weininger](#). Socrates and Wittgenstein had experience as soldiers and so, presumably, killed. The difference was that Weininger's suicide stemmed very directly from his philosophy. It was the conclusion of an argument he had carefully worked out, not an historical exigency.

Russians, or Jews—were essentially the same. As Heidegger put it in a 1933 lecture at Freiburg: “If one interprets [Plato’s] ideas as representations and thoughts that contain a value, a norm, a law, a rule, such that ideas then become conceived of as norms, then the one subject to these norms is the human being—not the historical human being, but rather the human being in general.” It was against this rootless, “general” conception of humanity, Heidegger told his students, that “we must struggle.”

...

Yet Hitler and Heidegger embraced anti-Semitic conspiracy theories for different reasons. Whereas the former argued that the Jews posed a racial threat (a fear for which the protocols offered evidence), the latter saw them as a philosophical one. The Jews, as uprooted nomads serving a transcendent God—albeit sometimes through their secular activities—embodied the very tradition that Heidegger wanted to overturn. Moreover, as Trawny points out, Heidegger found race deeply problematic. He did not dismiss the concept altogether; if understood as a biological feature of a particular people, race might well inform that people’s historical trajectory. *But he rejected using race as the primary determinant of identity. For Heidegger, racism was itself a function of misguided metaphysical thinking, because it presumed a biological, rather than historical, interpretation of what it meant to be human.* [emphasis added] By “fastening” people into “equally divided arrangement,” he wrote in the notebooks, racism went “hand in hand with a self-alienation of peoples—the loss of history.” Instead of obsessing over racial distinctions, Germans needed to confront their identity as an ongoing philosophical question. Heidegger overtly criticized the Nazis for their fixation on biological identity, but he also lambasted the Jews for the same sin. “The Jews,” he wrote in the notebooks, “have already been ‘living’ for the longest time according to the principle of race.”

Heidegger and the Jews / the Jews and Heidegger

Again, there is a tortured relationship between Jewish intellectuals and Heidegger. Heidegger’s anti-Semitism has never been a secret to anyone, though its depth as revealed in the recently published his *Schwartz Hefte* (Black Notebooks) has taken some by surprise. Earlier it may have been possible to separate Heidegger’s core philosophy of authenticity and rootedness (values not coincidentally *also* at the core Judaism and Jewish culture) from his political involvement with National Socialism. Many of Heidegger’s defenders are tempted to say one’s politics are one thing and fundamental metaphysics might be another. But the *Black Notebooks* make this stance hard to maintain. (See, for instance, this Swedish lecture series on Heidegger and the Jews in which six Heidegger scholars address the tension: [part 1](#) and [part 2](#).)

Heidegger’s notion of what rootedness means is geographical. It is tied to land and a community

stabilized by the land. It is how he understood what holds a community of people together, the *Volksgeist* (the spirit of the people or “national character”). By contrast, the Jewish notion of rootedness is a highly portable one, defined by extended familial, social, and cultural ties. Both the diaspora and the emblematic “outsider” status accorded the Jew in almost every community hosting them made this portability both expedient and necessary. Jewish cosmopolitan rootedness is, as such, almost anathema to Heidegger’s earthy and provincial variant. Yet, these different conceptions of what rootedness and being mean are *both* too close *and* world’s apart for comfort. There is a nervous, anxiety-ridden affinity between the two.

It is clear that Heidegger was anti-Judaic; he was *philosophically* opposed to what the Jew stood for. But he had no special reason to be anti-Semitic in the racialized sense adopted by the Nazis. He never expressed a desire to see Jews eliminated from the face of the earth, only from the culturally influential places they had gotten to within the German tribe which, he thought, had its own particular destiny to live out. He saw Jews as philosophically subversive. They often stood in the way of the inner cultural cohesion necessary, as Heidegger saw it, for the German people—a *different* people from the Jews—to fulfill their, the German people’s, place in history. The Jews stood in the way because they did not belong to the land and never would be.¹³ They belonged to each other. Theirs was an ethical cohesion not the ontological one Heidegger celebrated.

Flavors of “-isms”

I think we can make out at least four varieties of “anti-Semitism”:

1. “Banal”: a facile accord with prevalent social norms, related to what Arendt called the “the banality of evil.” “Such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together.” (Arendt, 1992: 288) Banal anti-Semitism is related to “structural” forms of racism and sexism in the sense that little agency or understanding on the part of anti-Semites of this kind, either of their targets or their own motivation in targeting, is required or sought. The label fits because it describes a behavior with little or no cognitive involvement. Those taken in by it hardly notice their involvement.
2. *Anti-Judaism*: involves a sophisticated understanding of, and philosophical opposition to, basic tenets or core values of Judaism (Heidegger, a case in point). It would be hard to find racist and sexist analogues to this orientation. (*Except* perhaps *within* the target groups, themselves. Perhaps, self-hatred is the place to look for it: whether Jewish or that of other marginalized groups.)
3. *Anti-Semitism “proper”*: fixation on any element of a target population conducive to scapegoating; “racialization” for the purpose of resentment or blame toward that which can be dominated because it is out-powered. This, the most virulent strain, combined with

¹³Zionism might be the Jewish cognate of Heideggerian geographical rootedness.

the banal variety, made for the Holocaust. Psychologically wounded and hate-filled, it is a toxic brew of human weakness and cruelty.

4. *Selbsthas*: or self-hatred. This is self-denigration within a marginalized group. In the present case, it is reflexive “anti-Semitism.” Elie Wiesel, cataloging the types of biblical stranger, writes of this fourth type as the *zar*:

Who is a *zar*? Originally the term applied to those Jews who were kept outside the Temple. Then the Prophets used it to describe the profane, the alien, the destructive elements in our midst. *Zar* is the Jew who remains a stranger to other Jews—and to the Jew in himself. The term implies a religious and metaphysical opposition to his own identity; a Jew who loathes his Jewishness is a *zar*—the worst of enemies....

This is serious, but there is something even more serious—to realize that I am a stranger to myself, which means that there is a stranger in me who wants to live my life or my death—or even to die by pushing me to my death through self-hate. This stranger forces me to look at things, events, and myself with *his* eyes, urging me to give up because of him.

One must never allow oneself to become this kind of stranger. To anybody. During the era of night and flame, the executioner wanted not only to kill us as strangers—anonously—but as numbers, as objects, not as human beings. He wanted to kill us twice—to kill the humanity in us before killing us.¹⁴

Wiesel is especially ill-disposed to this, the worst kind of anti-Semitism: *that owned by a Jew*. For it undermines the collective psychological cohesion necessary for survival as a community. It goes toxically to the heart of rootedness. It is the enemy within. Insofar as authenticity is valued and is viewed as inhering in integration in a community, the *zar* is the most dangerous enemy. The other classes of aliens to the Jew, Wiesel describes, may kill you, but the *zar* may kill your soul. To many Jews, as to Heidegger, a soul-killer is *the* worst of enemies. (Though Heidegger would have said “spirit-killer.”)

But a kinder term for what some think of as self-loathing might be *cosmopolitanism*.¹⁵ The thinker who most exactly embodies Wiesel’s fear is the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger—born Jew and Protestant convert, who, I think, more than anyone *performed* the tension between the psychological imperative to first and foremost *belong*, on the one side, and the ultimate imperative of *rational* philosophy to abstract, to rise above contingency, to estrange from the given, to universalize—on the other. Weininger, a “Kant gone mad,” philosophical performance artist that he was—once compared to a comet flashing across the night sky, for a brief moment, lit up the intellectual world.

14: *The Stranger in the Bible*, Schocken, 1995, p 67-9.

15. In the Diogenean sense.

If you want someone as anti-Heideggerian as possible—someone who did not *think* his authenticity (as though that were possible) but *acted* it out, it would be the 23 year-old suicide Otto Weininger, Wiesel’s self-hating Jew, a *zar*, par excellence.

The problem is that for Heidegger (as for many including Aristotle) philosophy is about therapy. Philosophy for them is about making peace with reality. They set about proffering recipes to this end. But there is an equally strong and countervailing tradition, just as old, bent on reformation of “the way things are.” And “within” Jewish thought, Weininger is perhaps the most radical exemplar of this school. “Within” is scare-quoted because, Weininger is the ultimate Jewish outsider, a *zar*. Yet, *outsiderness* is prerequisite to making peace, not with reality, but with truth... if you believe in that, as poor Weininger did. And Jews—by tradition, teaching, and history—have excellent training in outsiderness. Being an outsider to others is one thing, to yourself, something else again. It is bound to be misunderstood and distrusted.

The irony is that Heidegger was a Jewish thinker in practice if not avowedly; Weininger, the Jew, the most secular¹⁶ thinker I have ever read.

Pernicious prejudices and philosophers

Was Heidegger’s evident partiality that unusual? Or are we just too close in time to him to toy with the forgiveness thing? We might draw the lesson from Baggini’s article that we will eventually get off our high-horse and see Heidegger as merely the somewhat vain philosophical creature he was and less the “spiritual leader” of the Nazi Party he sometimes fancied himself—then proceed to cut him slack.

Or we might not...

To help us decide, I think it will be instructive to put Heidegger—and philosophers, in general—in perspective on the subject of *partiality*, to which anti-Semitism, in this discussion, serves as segue. Partiality acts like friction limiting the speed of unfettered reason.

John Locke on the Jews, *et al.*

In “[Locke and the Jews: From Toleration to the ‘Destruction of the Temple’](#),” Raffaele Russo examines Locke’s attitude towards Jews. At best, we can say this about Locke’s imperative:

16 Despite his conversion to Protestantism months before his death. It was literally a “protest” conversion. Most Austrian Jews who converted went Catholic. Weininger’s home-brew version of Christianity called for *voluntary human extinction* on purely ethical grounds. It recalls Simone Weil’s conversion to Catholicism. When these Jews converted they did so *intensely*, putting to shame their new peers. Weil once responded on hearing that the Pope’s intellectual minions objected to certain extremism in her religious writings by remarking that *she* was Catholic—the Pope was *just* the Pope. For Weininger, mere atheism would still be too infused with the arrogance of the living.

tolerate the Jews because there is no way to distinguish essential religious practice from the inessential sort in their case. It was either tolerate them or exclude them altogether. They were not a threat (so *few* and so *non-proselytizing* and, moreover, they could be *useful* to commercial projects) so there was no reason to exclude them. Contrast the Church of England dissenters (most especially Catholics): these *did* proselytize and threatened to be many, and thus were dangerous to political stability, tied, as that was, to religious homogeneity, Locke (and a million others) would tell us.

But, not unlike Heidegger, Locke had philosophical/religious qualms with Judaism. Writes Russo:

The emphasis Locke is thus brought to give here to the anti-Mosaic elements present in Paul's Epistles brought him to make statements that often sound anti-Semitic, as when he ties the ruination of the Jewish people to their guilt. Taken literally, these interpretations are often very dubious: for instance, there is a passage where Paul speaks of certain slander-mongers, who attribute ideas to him that he had never thought of or sustained ('some affirm that we say', etc.), and declares that their 'damnation is just' (Romans 3:8). Locke would seem to have no doubt: 'some' here means 'the Jews': 'St Paul always tender towards his own nation [*sic*] forbears to name them when he pronounces this sentence that their casting off, and destruction now at hand, for this scandal and other opposition to the Christian religion, was just', and the unwitting irony of Locke's comment on how 'tender' Saint Paul was towards the nation of his birth does not prevent the reader from seeing that in these considerations Locke is using a classic anti-Semite argument.

In short, Locke thought the Jews *guilty* of Christicide... or, at least, they behaved like they knew they were unworthy of integrating into society.

Locke thought of Catholics the way Heidegger thought of Jews: their views were too close and competitive for comfort. The Jews, in contrast, might be tolerated as they were so few and socially disenfranchised as not to be threat material. Not so, the Catholics. Let your guard down and England would revert to Popishness if the Catholic heir to the throne James II and his supporters were not kept at bay.

Moreover, Jews just might be converted—and wouldn't that be nice? His thinking on dissenters from the true religion, including Jews, is enshrined in the document he authored that governed a large part of the American Colonies:

[The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina : March 1, 1669](#)

Article 97.

But since the natives of that place, who will be concerned in our plantation, are utterly strangers

to Christianity, whose idolatry, ignorance, or mistake gives us no right to expel or use them ill; and those who remove from other parts to plant there will unavoidably be of different opinions concerning matters of religion, the liberty whereof they will expect to have allowed them, and it will not be reasonable for us, on this account, to keep them out, that civil peace may be maintained amidst diversity of opinions, and our agreement and compact with all men may be duly and faithfully observed; the violation whereof, upon what presence soever, cannot be without great offence to Almighty God, and great scandal to the true religion which we profess; and also that **Jews**, heathens, and other dissenters from the purity of Christian religion may not be scared and kept at a distance from it, but, by having an opportunity of acquainting themselves with the truth and reasonableness of its doctrines, and the peaceableness and inoffensiveness of its professors, may, by good usage and persuasion, and all those convincing methods of gentleness and meekness, suitable to the rules and design of the gospel, be won ever to embrace and unfeignedly receive the truth; therefore, any seven or more persons agreeing in any religion, shall constitute a church or profession, to which they shall give some name, to distinguish it from others.

Incidentally, further down he tells us what he thought of black slaves:

Article 110.

Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever.

David Hume on the Jews, *et al.*

In this blog post, [“On David Hume, Stereotype threat and Anti-Semitism \(and also his racism\).”](#) Eric Schliesser takes on what happens when empiricism confronts stereotypes. In the case of Hume, stereotypes win. If you are an empiricist, you look around for evidence. You don’t start out with principles that are going to structure what you see—*a la* Kant, say. (That’s the plan, anyway.) Commonly held generalizations must have some kernel of truth in them, right? Else, how could they have arisen? Everybody knows Jews are “noted for fraud.” An *observation* that must, in some sense, be true, right?

Ditto for dark-skin folk. They are *naturally* inferior. Who has ever seen an exception? Hume writes, “In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.” And Hume, elsewhere in footnote 10 to his infamous essay, [“Of National Characters,”](#) speculates,

I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences ... [T]here are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity.

Compare Hume's with the methodological rigor expressed here:

In North America, where the population is prevalently Teutonic, and where those elements intermingled with the inferior race only to a very small degree, we have a quality of mankind and a civilization which are different from those of Central and South America. In these latter countries the immigrants—who mainly belonged to the Latin races—mated with the aborigines, sometimes to a very large extent indeed. In this case we have a clear and decisive example of the effect produced by the mixture of races. But in North America the Teutonic element, which has kept its racial stock pure and did not mix it with any other racial stock, has come to dominate the American Continent and will remain master of it as long as that element does not fall a victim to the habit of adulterating its blood.

So writes Adolf Hitler (*Mein Kampf*, Volume 1, Chapter 11, "Race and People," James Murphy trans., 1939.)

The bottom line is that Hume *was true* to his philosophy. The world at the edge of his senses indicated his world. We cannot blame Hume for not perceiving what he did not perceive. He swam in a racist milieu, what else may we expect of an honest empiricist?

Actually, I think, we *can* expect better.

You see, Hume, was, in fact, corrected by someone who had perceived things he hadn't, who had a different experience from him, and whose observations were well known even then, in the 18th Century, but which he, Hume, the great empiricist, somehow ignored. In 1770, James Beattie, a fellow Scottish philosopher, published his *Essay on Truth*, in which he [directly targeted Hume's account](#) of the apparent natural superiority of Europeans and their culture in terms often taken for granted today. Hume was well aware of Beattie's refutation and chose to dismiss it. Hume *should* have known better. If he thought Beattie wrong, he *should* have engaged him, like any decent philosopher. Hume, "*le bon David*," didn't. He never recanted or even hedged his note.¹⁷

Thus Hume's method, his empiricism, shows its limitation when applied to the scrutiny of human tropes like anti-Semitism or racism.¹⁸ And his other famous method, his skepticism, he fails to mobilize in this sphere.

Immanuel Kant on the Jews, *et al.*

¹⁷ Of any text, Hume more or less concludes, "*Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No.* Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion." (Aka, "Hume's Fork.") So he ends his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. It's important not to consign Hume's texts to the flames merely because he gets some facts wrong.

¹⁸ Hume has one specifically ethical intuition that, to his credit, is more defensible. It is his theory of moral beneficence, which *just happens* to correlate with modern feminist ethical theories such as Care Ethics. But this marks the hit-and-miss nature of classical empiricism. It is hit-and-miss by design because, presumably, nature reveals itself hit-and-missedly. Empiricists take this arbitrariness as an indication of authentic or significant interaction with mind-independence.

Are rationalists and idealists in a better position vis-a-vis their prejudices? Normatively speaking, I think so. Here's why. The very strategy that causes their ontology and method to seem "divorced from reality" is also conducive to distancing from its muck and mire. Local prejudice has a less sure foothold when it cannot appeal to "the way things are" as though "the way things are" were any indication of how they *should* be.

To be sure, Kant, the man, in the beginning, does not make a better showing than Hume at disciplining his partialities. He tells us:

Every coward is a liar; Jews for example, not only in business, but also in common life.¹⁹

Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites, ... The yellow Indians do have a meagre talent. The Negroes are far below them, and at the lowest point are a part of the American people.²⁰

Kant, like Hume, to say the least, wrote nothing against the received practice of enslaving Africans or the popular subhuman characterization of Native Americans.²¹ At least early on. Still, Kant's moral philosophy at its core offers a vantage point that better explains *why* we should restrain our partialities than does Hume's.

Unlike Hume's, Kant's moral theory is universalist, anti-empirical, and fiercely normative. It is skyscraping and does not concede "all-too-human" excuses so easily. Kant himself, it appears, succumbed to his own theory which, it must have dawned on him at some point, cannot abide making racial distinctions on pain of inconsistency. At the very core of his moral theory is the principle: A being capable of rational autonomy is, *by that fact alone*, a worthy subject of inviolable moral regard.²² Absolutely *nothing* else matters. Not consequences, not affinity of any type, not habit, not deference to social authority or law, not what your mom or Jesus would do, not, in short, the usual set of human excuses. And certainly not biology (outside that necessary for reasoning) or cultural contingency (ethnicity).

19 The native part, the "red Indian." Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 27.

20 Kant, *Lectures on Physical Geography*, 9: 316. See also "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race," Pauline Kleingeld, *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 229, October 2007, and "[Kant made disparaging statements about Jews and non-whites](#)," Jeet Heer, *National Post*, September 15, 2003.

21. As for women: Kant saw them as literally incapable of morality and reason! They were outside the moral purview, adiaphorous—akin to flora, fauna, and children. And although Kant stopped using race and ethnicity as markers of moral status, he never did the same for biological sex. Nevertheless, there is a fascinating and subversive interpretation of his view on women that makes it radically different from the contemporary notion of "sexism." It deserves separate and extensive treatment... which I may offer at another time.

22 The qualification "capable" is critical here. There are no guarantees that anyone ever *is* rationally autonomous. "Capable" here means "we can imagine it." Kant's moral psychology is sufficiently astute to mark the problem of reflexive moral knowledge: *my* knowledge concerning the morality of any act *I* may perform is *essentially* opaque. We have sufficient *imaginative* powers for rational autonomy. More than that presumes too much.

Something happened to Kant. He started out all-too-human, like most others—*saying one thing and doing another*. Then it must have occurred to him, “I can’t be *both* partial *and* Kant at the same time!” Was Kant’s mind changed by contemporaneous developments in his social/political environment or in science? Did others call new “facts” about the human world to his attention? Or did his commitment to abstract universal principle force him to rethink?

Contrary to Baggini’s claim in the epigraph, some normative philosophies are *designed* to demand more of us than others—and these, as often as what people say and do in the company you keep, may direct a moral sea-change. There is good reason to think this is what happened to Kant.

Just as Hume had James Beattie call him out, Kant also had his contemporary critics. Among them were fellow philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder and leading biologists of his time. (It is important to remember Kant was well-connected with the scientific world for most of his career. Indeed, he taught science and mathematics for most of it, only coming to philosophy rather late.) Others made sure Kant was made aware his views on race made prior to the early 1790s were not in accord with the science even then. This may have contributed to the change of mind, but, as Pauline Kleingeld argues, Kant’s moral theory, on its own and highly non-empirical, was sufficiently intolerant of the kinds of partiality he had been parroting earlier. It forced his development of new concept in the history of ideas: a “cosmopolitan right.” As Kleingeld explains, it

...pertains to individuals as ‘citizens of the world’, i.e., independently of national affiliation, and regulates the interaction between states and foreign individuals. Cosmopolitan right applies to humans on all continents, and is explicitly incompatible with slavery and colonialism. Clearly, this view would not occur to someone who views whites as superior and non-whites as so radically inferior that the first may use the second as mere means (as slaves). The same holds for Kant’s critique of colonialist injustice, which also appears for the first time in the mid-1790s.²³

Kant, in effect, pulled the notion we have come to call a “human right” out of the air. By the mid-1790s, in works like *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Kant was no longer sanctioning any excuse for *moral* partiality. His political and legal philosophy finally matured into conformity with his moral theory. And, for Kant, moral theory was *the highest* authority on human affairs. The same logic would counter anti-Semitic judgements.

Bertrand Russell and the Jews

Bertrand Russell was not exactly an anti-Semite, but at one time he did think it would be a good

23 “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” Kleingeld, Pauline, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 57 (2007), p. 585.

idea, for all concerned, to court favor with Adolf Hitler.

“If the Germans succeed in sending an invading army to England we should do best to treat them as visitors, give them quarters and invite the commander and chief to dine with the prime minister,” writing to British critic Godfrey Carter, Russell added, “Such behaviour would completely baffle them.”²⁴

Rabbi Marvin Hier, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre’s founder, comments,

In the letter, written during the time Hitler was stripping German Jews of their rights, sending political prisoners to the brutal Dachau concentration camp and building a huge military machine, Russell said he saw no value in engaging the country in war.

“We may win or we may lose,” he wrote. “If we lose obviously no good has been done. If we win we shall inevitably during the struggle acquire their bad qualities and the world at the end will be no better off than if we had lost.”²⁵

But he [Russell] didn’t understand a basic concept: that the idea that you allow evil to flourish under these conditions, that if we act nice to Hitler, serve him the best wine, that Hitler will come around to see things our way is just preposterous.

Russell was a pacifist. His philosophy thus entailed, apparently, that Jews were expendable... Or was Russell just being his usual snarky? Sincere or sarcastic?

Consider each possibility in turn:

1. *Sincere*—then what of the contrast with, say, Martin Heidegger?

Heidegger joined the Nazi Party, even lending it a modicum of Heideggerian support. (For what that was worth. Apparently, it wasn’t appreciated as much as he had hoped.) Never mind that he dedicated *Being and Time* to his Jewish teacher, Edmund Husserl, or was chummy with Martin Buber and once lovers with Hannah Arendt—all Jews.²⁶

24. And Churchill might have gotten on well at dinner with *das Fuhrer*. See note 10. They both thought highly of Aryans. Churchill, too, thought humanity would do better if some of its non-Aryan sectors were eliminated, namely, Indians (from India—despite the fact that Aryan originally meant “Indo-European,” and so included many Indians). [He tried to starve as many as he could](#). “People started dying [Indians did as a result of largely colonial policies] and Churchill said well it’s all their fault anyway for breeding like rabbits. He said ‘[I hate the Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion](#)’.” And more things like, “[I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes](#).”

25. “[U.S. Museum to Exhibit Bertrand Russell's 'Be Nice to Hitler' Letter --- Museum of Tolerance buys British Nobel Prize-winning philosopher's letter in which he said the British should invite Adolf Hitler to dinner rather than fight](#),” *The Associated Press*, Feb 20, 2014.

26. Or, originally so in the case of Husserl.

2. *Sarcastic*—then what of the reputed directness and clarity valued in analytic philosophy? Was Russell anticipating Derrida?

Russell—one of the founders of analytic philosophy—and his fans cannot have it both ways. The not-so-subtle innuendo of this notice in a Jewish publication was that Russell *was* sincere: and culpably “mistaken,” never mind that he later came around to the politically correct attitude toward Hitler. He never changed his mind about pacifism. Either Russell was sincere at the time, hence dense, or he expressed a gross callousness unbecoming of so eminent a thinker. Stupid or callous, which?

Russell, consistent with his principled pacifism,²⁷ may have been right in the final remark, “If we lose, obviously no good has been done. If we win, we shall inevitably during the struggle acquire their bad qualities and the world at the end will be no better off than if we had lost.” But Heidegger may well have said the same.

Maybe Russell was just showing off how concerned with precision he and some of the early names in analytic philosophers were. “Hitler’s ideals come mainly from Nietzsche,” he informs us.²⁸ And how right the English are: “By God, Ryle, I believe you are right. No one ever had Common Sense before John Locke—and no-one but Englishmen have ever had it since.”²⁹ There is not even a pretence of impartiality. One must admire the “clarity and precision” with which such pronouncements err.

Gottlob Frege and the Jews

Frege, along with Russell and Wittgenstein, is regarded as one of the founders of Analytic philosophy. Long before Russell had attempted to do the same, the German logician had begun the project of reducing mathematics to pure logical concepts. Since Kant had earlier considered

27 In the 1915 essay “[The Ethics of War](#),” Russell writes, “By a ‘war of colonization’ I mean a war whose purpose is to drive out the whole population of some territory and replace it by an invading population of a different race... In modern times the conflicts of Europeans with American-Indians, Maories, and other aborigines in temperate regions, have been of this kind. Such wars are totally devoid of technical justification, and are apt to be more ruthless than any other war. Nevertheless, if we are to judge by results, we cannot regret that such wars have taken place. They have the merit, often quite fallaciously claimed for all wars, of leading in the main to the survival of the fittest, and it is chiefly through such wars that the civilized portion of the world has been extended from the neighborhood of the Mediterranean to the greater part of the earth’s surface.” The “principle” guiding Russell’s “pacifism” appears to be an unholy amalgam of utilitarianism and social Darwinism. We might call it unadulterated partiality.

28 Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (OUP, 1960) 210. First published in 1935. Had Nietzsche never existed, the Nazis might have acquired their partiality from Churchill. It is hard finding *any* philosopher who was not anti-Semitic. Wiesel, as noted above, even counts major Jewish ones among them. But Nietzsche must count as one of the least.

29 Russell quoted in Gilbert Ryle, “John Locke,” in *Collected Papers* Volume 1, ed. Gilbert Ryle (Hutchinson, 1971), 147. [This and prior citation are owing to Thomas Lawrence Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of British Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the spectre of Europe*, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2011.]

mathematics a subjective enterprise, too dependent on concepts ungrounded in empirical experience, while logic (everyone assumed) was not, Frege and Russell independently took on the project showing how Kant could be wrong. The work of reduction depended specifically on the logical notion of *classes*—groups of things: the class of dogs, of left-handed, brown-eyed people, of black holes, the class of [you name it]. Classes could be used, it was suggested by Russell, to define numbers in purely extensional terms. Who needs the number “two” to *mean* anything beyond pointing out the class of all groupings of two things: two bananas, two philosophers, two sexes, etc.? “Two” does *not*, and need *not*, *mean* anything else, as many Platonist/Kantian-minded mathematicians were inclined to believe. An extensional reduction fit well with an empiricist program, the main game in town at the time, hence the urgency. Any and everything can belong to a class or classes.

But then it occurred to Russell to ask if “the class of all classes” *belongs* to itself? In other words, does the group of things containing all the possible groups of things also contain itself? It was important that there be an answer to this question, a *purely logical reason* why or why not. (Otherwise, the desired reduction fails.) But any purely logical answer turned out paradoxical. To use Russell’s famous illustration of the problem:

If there is a barber who shaves *all and only* the men in town who do not shave themselves, does this barber shave himself? Yes or no?

- If he does, then he does not shave himself. *If he does, then he doesn’t!*
- If he does not shave himself, then he does shave himself. *If he doesn’t, then he does!*

The logic is unseemly.³⁰

Russell shared this mind-bending result with Frege who graciously confirmed that their heroic project was in trouble. But that didn’t stop several generations of analytic philosophers from taking up the challenge of putting the full span of human knowledge on a logical footing—or, at least, arguing about the possible relevance of such a project.

And, so far, that is how it should be. In philosophy, marking the shipwreck of one plausible idea that had engaged many rigorous thinkers must itself be considered a success. “At least, we have mapped the location of one rabbit hole. Now let’s go find others. (Hopefully without forgetting where that one was.)” Along the way, much logical machinery was invented that has been helpful, not only in mathematical logic, the philosophy of language, but in more practical regions such as computer science. Frege laid the groundwork for all this and is thus as big a name as they come within the analytic tradition.

30. We are assuming the conventional logic of the time (still held by many). There are ways to defuse the paradox, but they come at a pretty heavy price. The logical infrastructure must change. We might amend or discard “the law of contradiction.”

Michael Dummett, a third generation Fregean expert, as a young philosopher, went to Jena, where Frege had taught, to dig into the *Nachlass* of this great mind. Dummett was full of admiration but disturbed by some things he learned from Frege's diary that no one had mentioned before. He writes in *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (1973):

There is some irony for me in the fact that the man about whose philosophical views I have devoted, over years, a great deal of time to thinking about, was, at least at the end of his life, a virulent racist, specifically, an anti-Semite. This fact is revealed by a fragment of a diary which.... shows Frege to have been a man of extreme right-wing opinions, bitterly opposed to the parliamentary system, democrats, liberals, Catholics, the French and, above all, Jews, who he thought ought to be deprived of political rights and, preferably, expelled from Germany. When I read that diary, many years ago, I was deeply shocked, because I had revered Frege as an absolutely rational man, if, perhaps, not a particularly likeable one. I regret that the editors of Frege's *Nachlass* chose to suppress that particular item.

Frege missed being around for the rise of the Nazis by a few years (he died in 1925), but the record he left of his political views might have put Heidegger's to shame. He did know of Hitler and agreed with him:

One can acknowledge that there are Jews of the highest respectability and yet regard it as a misfortune that there are so many Jews in Germany, and that they have complete equality of political rights with citizens of Aryan descent.

Ray Monk (noted Wittgenstein and Russell biographer, whose article I rely on here) remarks:

The single thing I can imagine Russell finding most shocking would be Frege's endorsement of patriotism as an unreasoning prejudice.³¹ The absence of political insight characteristic of his times,³² Frege says, is due to "a complete lack of patriotism." He acknowledges that patriotism involves prejudice rather than impartial thought, but he thinks that is a good thing: "Only Feeling participates, not Reason, and it speaks freely, without having spoken to Reason beforehand for counsel. And yet, at times, it appears that such a participation of Feeling is needed to be able to make sound, rational judgments in political matters." These are surely surprising views for "an absolutely rational man" to express. The man who wanted to set mathematics on surer logical foundations, was content for politics to be based on emotional spasms.³³

So much for the values of clarity and precision, again. In the case of Heidegger, he leaves us

31. I don't know about this. See Russell's remark, cited earlier, about the Englishman's exclusive possession of common sense.

32. All times.

33. "[The machine in the ghost: Frege's mind was the most powerful motor in modern philosophy. But as a human](#)

with enough that we can tell a philosophical story about how one might ground an unsavory attitude in fairly plausible underpinnings. The effort may be instructive because it happens more often than most will admit. Sadly, for Frege, we don't have sufficient material for that. We just get a picture of anti-Semitism, either of the "banal" or the "properly anti-Semitic" type noted earlier—neither flattering, neither an invitation to think hard about the most difficult things that Wittgenstein, for one, thought the skills of a philosopher are good for. If they are good for anything.

We could go on...

...but hopefully the point has been made that, although one could quibble with many of the aspersions cast here, philosophy is done exclusively by humans (as far as we know) and humans are partial to the bone.³⁴ But I do not agree with Baggini that passing judgment on the dead is therefore a waste.

It is *not* correct to say that a philosophical idea can be sterilized of human agenda or vagary.

It is *also* not correct to say that all philosophical ideas can be reduced to a list of ancient or current social prejudices—or evolutionary tendencies, for that matter.

After all, doing either of those two things *is* to make a philosophical claim. Tainted with what?

Doing philosophy *entails* passing judgment. Full stop. You are only safe leaving "correctness" out of it.

Resources

The Wikipedia article, [Heidegger and Nazism](#), is particularly informative.

[“The German Martin and the Jewish Mordechai: A Meeting between Buber and Heidegger, 1957.”](#) Gil Weissblei, National Library of Israel. Documents a less well-known friendly meeting between the two philosophers.

In a lecture series, held in Sweden, titled “Tainted Greatness,” six Heidegger scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish, try to come to terms with his peculiar brand of anti-Judaism: [“Heidegger & the](#)

[being, he was a narrow man who left little mark.”](#) Ray Monk, *Prospect Magazine*, September 12, 2017.

34 And what of those philosophers who expressly targeted partiality as Jeremy Bentham did? In his [Defence of Usury, Letter X](#), he called out the Christian hypocrisy of decrying the making of money by lending on interest while exploiting to self-advantage those who did. The Jew did what Christians would do *sans* the cooked up qualms. In the course of his defense, Bentham notes educe Aristotle in support of the idea that even pagans knew usury was wrong. Bentham thought cultural tropes—including usury, the sin of it and the despicableness of those who did it, the Jews—*not* based on improving the lot of sentient beings, were indefensible. Like Kant, though with less psychological sophistication, Bentham's principle-based moral theory was rigorously anti-partial.

[Jews](#)” (part 1) and “[The Jews and Heidegger](#)” (part 2). List of speakers include: Hans Ruin, Marion Heinz, Richard Wolin, Joseph Cohen, Sarah Hammerschlag, and Raphael Zagury-Orly. The [Lecture](#) in part 2 by [Sarah Hammerschlag](#), between 14:45 - 32:58 is especially recommended.

[Heidegger’s Black Notebooks: philosophy, politics and anti-Semitism](#). Nine more podcast talks, part of a conference on the topic at Emory University.

“[Heidegger on Facebook and Twitter: Digital Heidegger, Zombie Texts and Philosophical Porn](#),” Babette Babich, Fordham University, talk published Sep 19, 2016. Babich offers critical commentary on the reception of Heidegger’s “Black Notebooks,” especially the editor of the Heidegger’s *Nachlass*, Peter Trawny.

“[Why sexist and racist philosophers might still be admirable](#),” Julian Baggini, *Aeon*. Not explicitly about *anti-Semitism* and philosophy, but Baggini’s argument applies just the same. While acknowledging his premises, I cannot draw his conclusion that somehow we cannot *both* hold responsible *and* admire. Or even neither.